



# Forum on Rural Population Health

May 19-21, 2025  
Seaside, Oregon  
[ohsu.edu/orhforum](https://ohsu.edu/orhforum)



## A Collective Approach to Death and Dying: An Equitable and Population Health Approach to Advancing End of Life Literacy in Rural Communities

Margo Lalach, MPH, BA, RN, North Coast EOL Collective, Co-Founder  
Beverly Stein, President, Cape Meares Community Association

**Genentech**  
*A Member of the Roche Group*



What does *Living Well* and  
*Ending Well* mean to you?

# Objectives

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1. **Identify barriers:** Understand rural communities' unique challenges in accessing end-of-life education and resources and explore effective strategies to address these gaps.

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1. **Integrate Planning:** Expand the understanding that discussing and planning for the end-of-life is a shared responsibility within a healthy community.

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1. **Enhance Community Initiatives:** Provide innovative examples of community-driven approaches to aging in place and preparing for end-of-life, emphasizing creative and collaborative solutions that address population health in a rural community where 27% of the Tillamook County population is 65 years and older.



# Population Health ~ Public Health

**Social Determinants of  
Health and Living Well  
Impact**

**Death and Ending Well**

Living Well ~ Ending Well

# Why Death & Dying Are Health Equity and Population Health Issues

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## Unequal Access to End-of-Life Care

- Rural, low-income, and BIPOC communities face barriers to hospice, palliative care, and home death options
- Financial burden and lack of care planning increase suffering and reduce dignity

## Structural Inequities Influence the Dying Experience

- Historical trauma, discrimination, and mistrust of medical systems affect care access and decision-making
- Language, immigration status, and literacy gaps limit informed choice

## Dying Well Is Part of Living Well

- Public health includes the full lifespan—including dying and grieving
- Advance planning and community-based care improve outcomes and respect autonomy

# Population Health Includes Grief, Legacy & Dignity

## Grief Is a Public Health Concern

- Unprocessed grief contributes to mental health crises, substance use, and chronic illness
- High-death burden communities (e.g., COVID, overdose) need collective support and healing

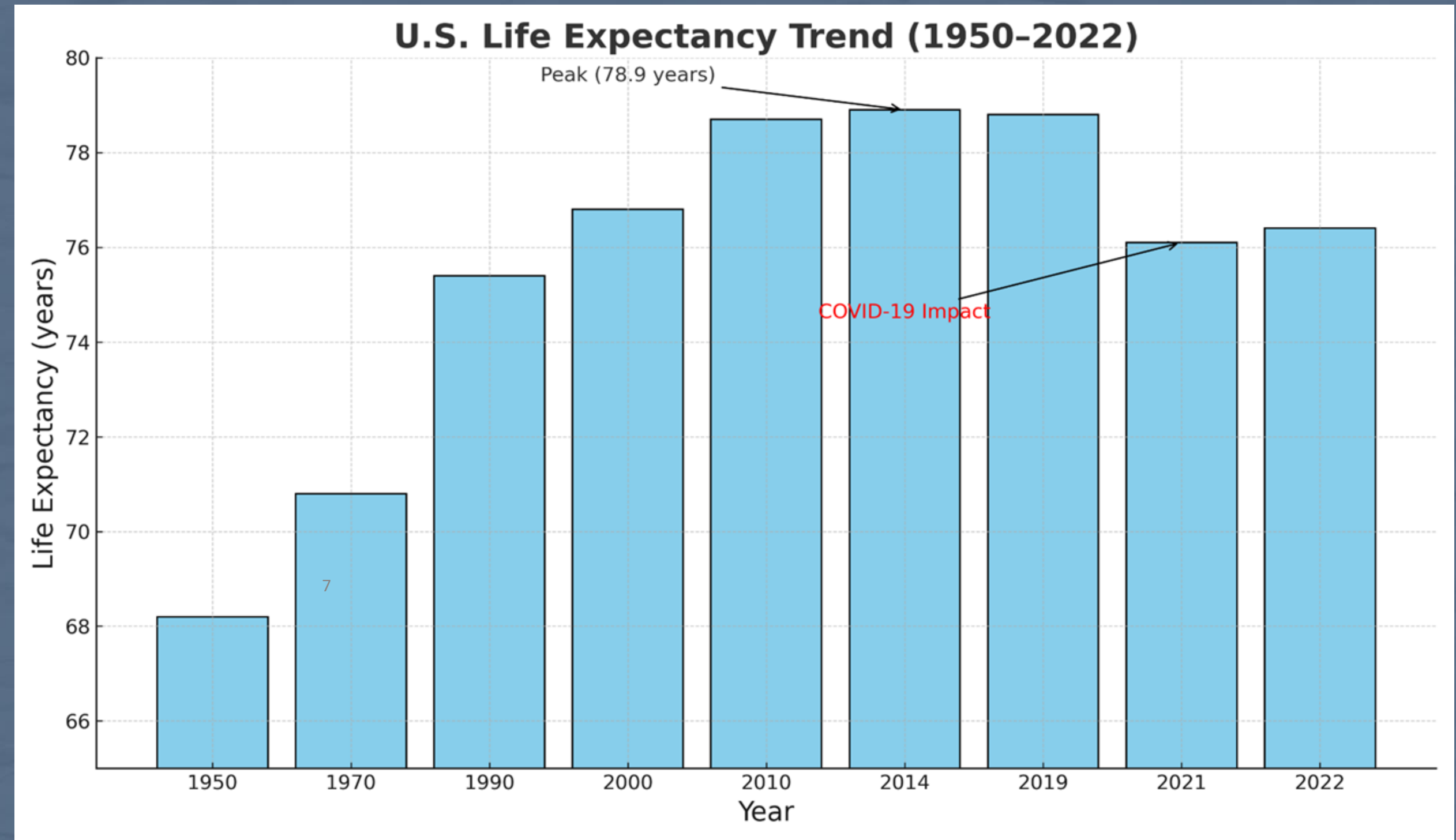
## Health Equity = Death Literacy<sup>6</sup>

- Everyone deserves culturally respectful, identity-affirming end-of-life care
- Building death literacy enables informed choices, autonomy, and reduced trauma



# U.S. Life Expectancy Trend (1950–2022)

"For the first time in modern U.S. history, adult life expectancy has decreased due to a combination of drug overdoses, suicides, rising chronic disease, gun violence, and the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2023). *National Center for Health Statistics: Life Expectancy Data*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/life-expectancy.htm>

Woolf, S.H., Masters, R.K., Aron, L.Y. (2021). *Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Life Expectancy in the United States*. JAMA Network, 326(16), 1632–1634. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2784350>

Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2020). *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

# Pediatric and Adolescent Populations

Compared to prior generations, today's pediatric and adolescent populations are growing up with significantly greater exposure to death and dying — through rising rates of suicide, homicide, mass violence, the opioid crisis, and pandemic-related losses. This shift marks a profound change in the developmental landscape for youth.

## Sources:

CDC, Lancet, Everytown, Pew Research, JAMA Network, Common Sense Media



# OUR STORY

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## VIRTUAL INFO SESSION

Sept 7 | 12 - 12:30PM

Oct 19 | 12 - 12:30PM

NORTH COAST  
EOL  
COLLECTIVE

# Vision

A Collective Approach to Death and Dying

# Mission

Creating community by connecting people, resources, and experiences to educate and support a holistic approach to end-of-life for individuals and families living on the North Coast.

# Values

**Acceptance** – to be a container for the joy, suffering, and uncertainty of each person’s lived experience and relationship with death and dying.

**Belonging** – person-centered, inclusive, equitable. Each person has a unique lived experience and story within our shared humanity.

**Connection** – with a servant’s heart to listen, bear witness to, and hold the story of each individual and family as a unique and integral part of our shared humanity and sense of place.

**Legacy** – the invitation to create beauty and meaning from our lived experience and story





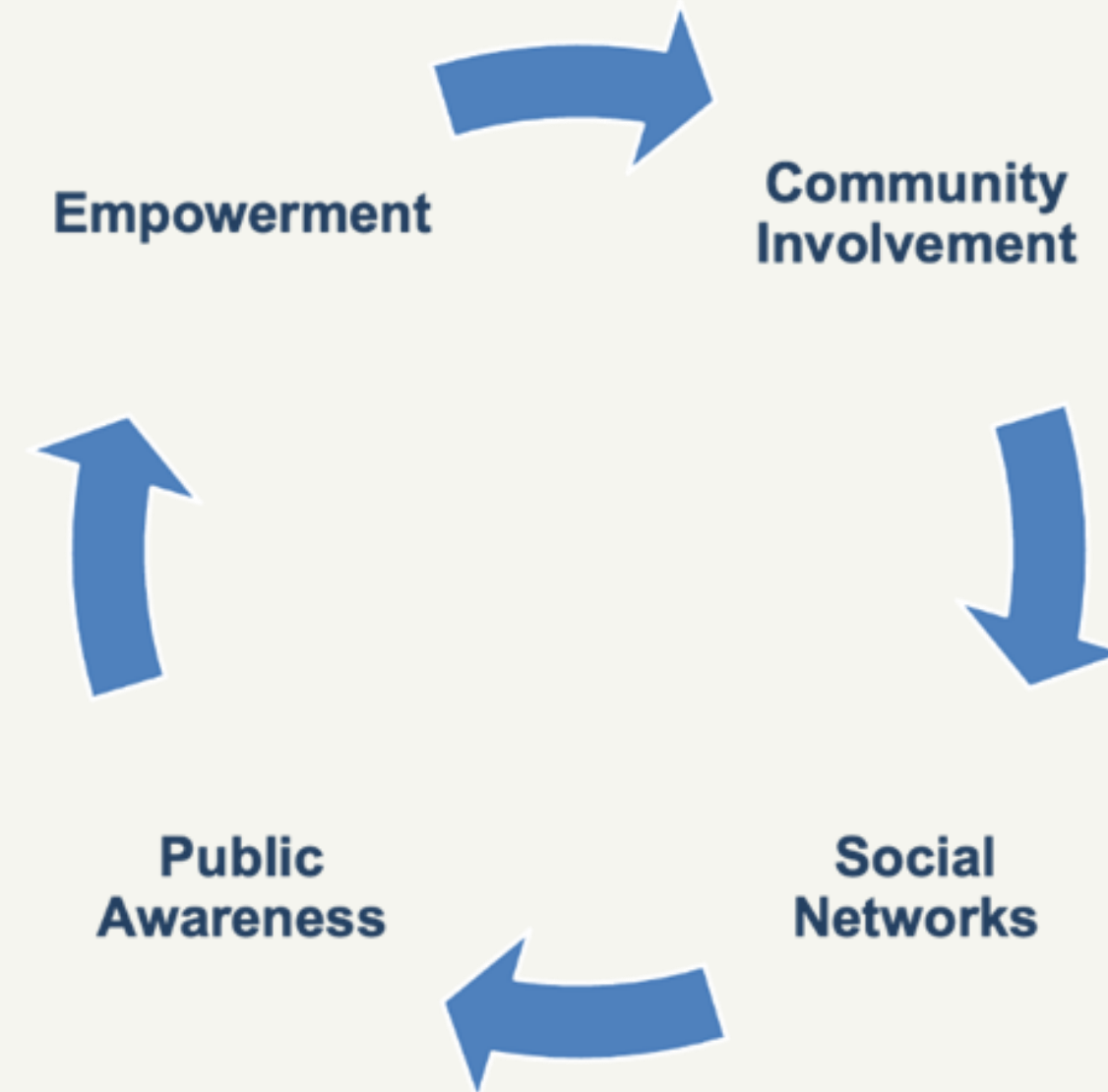
“Our practice is based on the belief that the North Coast EOL Collective has a shared responsibility to the community by making visible what is too often invisible.”



# Compassionate Community Model

*Communities are empowered to develop initiatives tailored to their local needs, creating systems of care that are more responsive and inclusive.*

Is an approach to end-of-life care that seeks to engage the broader community in supporting individuals and families through dying, death, loss, and caregiving. ***It emphasizes the idea that end-of-life care is not just the responsibility of healthcare professionals but also of the community in which the person lives.***





# Structure

The North Coast EOL (End of Life) Collective can play a pivotal role in shifting the paradigm from an institutional model of care to a more holistic, community-based, and collective approach to death and dying

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[Benefit Corporation for Good](#)

Hybrid



*"Create unencumbered...."*



# Services



**Meaning Making and Legacy Projects  
with Co-Founder Carolina Starrett**

*"We all have a story, it's all in the telling."*

- ☐ Health System Navigation
- ☐ Advanced Care Planning
- ☐ Aging and EOL Consultation
- ☐ Grief, Bereavement, Traumatic Loss
- ☐ Resource and Referral
- ☐ Legacy Project(s)
- ☐ Death Cafe(s)
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Community Engagement

**Individual**

**Community**

**Virtual**

**Home**



# Community Education and Impact

*"I had no idea."*

- CMCA
- Suzanne Elise
- Conscious Aging
- Green and Conservation Burials
- Legacy and Meaning Making
- Compassion and Choices
- Death with Dignity
- Funeral Rites and Family Rights
- Fiscal and Legal
- ACP and POLST
- Donor programs
- Music Thanatology/Threshold Choir
- Grief and Bereavement
- Hospice and Palliative Care

**Educational Offerings**

**Conversation**

**Consultation**

# Current Initiatives

- Cape Meares: Aging in Place and Preparing for End-of-Life
- Oceanside/Netarts: Modeling Aging in Place and Preparing for End-of-Life
- Accorda Music Thanatology Institute – Community-Based Practice
- 2025 Forum on Rural Health: A Collective Approach to Death and Dying: An Equitable and Population Health Approach to Advancing End of Life Literacy in Rural Communities
- Caring for Communities – Conversations on Public Health Palliative Care
- Befriending Transitions: Conversation about Change
- Death Cafe(s)



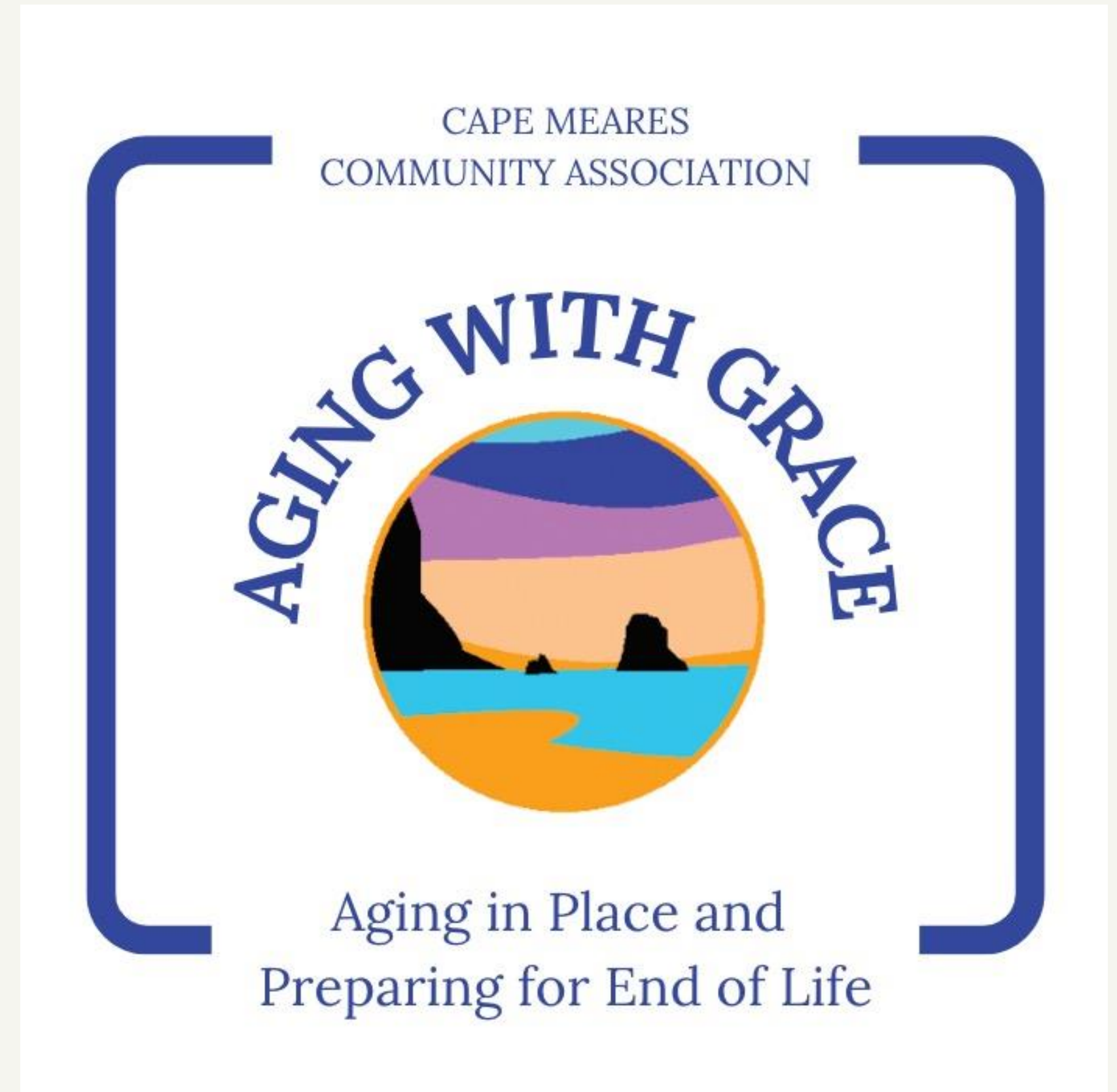
The screenshot displays the website of the Cape Meares Community Association. The header features a sunset over a beach with the association's logo and name. A navigation bar includes links for About, News, Events Calendar, Visiting Cape Meares, Community Projects, Support CMCA, and Emergency Preparedness. The main content area highlights the 'AGING WITH GRACE' initiative, which focuses on 'Aging in Place and Preparing for End of Life'. To the right, the 'Upcoming Events' section lists activities for April 2025:

Month	Date	Time	Event Details
April 2025	Friday April 18	10:00 am - 12:30 pm	Busy
	Saturday April 19	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm	Potluck (Wendy and Dave) Barbara Bennett Community Center 5690 4th Street NW Tillamook OR 97141



# Aging with Grace: Aging in Place and Preparing for End of Life

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**Cape Meares Community Association**



# The Cape Meares Community

Small coastal community with about 120 full-time residents and no commercial services

15 minutes to Tillamook and Adventist Hospital

Active and well organized community association and strong community spirit of cooperation and caring



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North Coast Drones (FB)



# Why Aging with Grace?

1. These are relevant issues for our community. The median age in Cape Meares is 75.
1. Little community discussion of these issues and there is a lack of knowledge of options
1. We rely on each other as part of our community ethic and the nature of our isolation

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## TERMS

- Community:** social environment and support network surrounding older adults
- Healthy Aging:** process of developing and maintaining functional ability that enables well being
- Aging in place:** ability of older adults to live in their own homes and communities safely, independently and comfortably
- End of life:** refers to the final stages of a person's life when death is imminent or expected
- Ending Well:** concept that emphasizes having a good quality of life as we age towards the end of our lives
- Life span:** refers to the maximum length of time that a person can potentially live under ideal circumstances. Life span is distinct from life expectancy = the average number of years a person is expected to live based on mortality rates



# Aging with Grace Project Goals and Vision

## Goals

1. Normalize discussion
2. Increase awareness and knowledge

## Vision

- Support for aging in place primarily through education and awareness
- Offer tools for preparing for aging in place and preparing for end of life

**TO: Cape Meares Board**  
**FROM: Bev, Kathy, Narayan, Mimi**  
**RE: Proposal for project**

### **Aging in Place and Preparing for End of Life**

#### **Why**

- These are relevant issues for our community. The median age in Cape Meares is 75. Twenty-five percent of people in Tillamook County are elderly.
- Little community discussion of these issues and there is a lack of knowledge of options
- We rely on each other as part of our community ethic and the nature of our isolation

#### **Goal**

- Normalize discussion of these issues
- Increase awareness and knowledge

#### **Vision**

- Support for aging in place primarily through education and awareness
- Tools for preparing for aging in place and preparing for end of life

# How it Started

- Six member Planning Team created
- Consulted with EOL Margo Lalich
- CMCA Board designated as a CMCA project September 2024 with \$200 allocation (additional allocation of \$600 in 2025 CMCA budget)
- Cape Meares book club read Being Mortal by Atul Gawande
- Created Aging with Grace site on CMCA website

## CMCA Aging in Place and Preparing for End of Life Project Action Plan 11.8.24

1. **Grace in Aging: an educational series on aging in place and end of life options**
  - January: Estate Planning Overview (wills, trusts, POA, health care POA, etc.)  
**Bev and Ann**
    - Contact Taylor Kittell, estate planning attorney
  - February: Hospice, palliative care, patient advocacy, Medical Aid in dying, death doulas, emergency preparedness for people with illnesses, slow medicine overview **Narayan and Terry**
    - Contact Margo Lalich, EOL Collective
  - March: Advanced directives, dementia directives, POLSTs, end of life options (Voluntary Stop Eating and Drinking) overview **Mimi and Narayan**
    - Tina Castenaras confirmed for March 1, 10-12
    - May be followed by a workshop to fill out forms including making video statements
  - April: Burial, funeral, celebration and legacy options **Peggy and Bev**
    - Contact Margo Lalich, EOL Collective, for possible presenters

### Next steps:

- First name listed takes the lead in contacting and scheduling speaker and coordinating the event. Note CMCA community calendar for conflicts.
- Identify title for each presentation and a brief one or two sentence description
- Reserve community center with Patti
- Prepare flyer announcing the series. logo - ask Kirsten

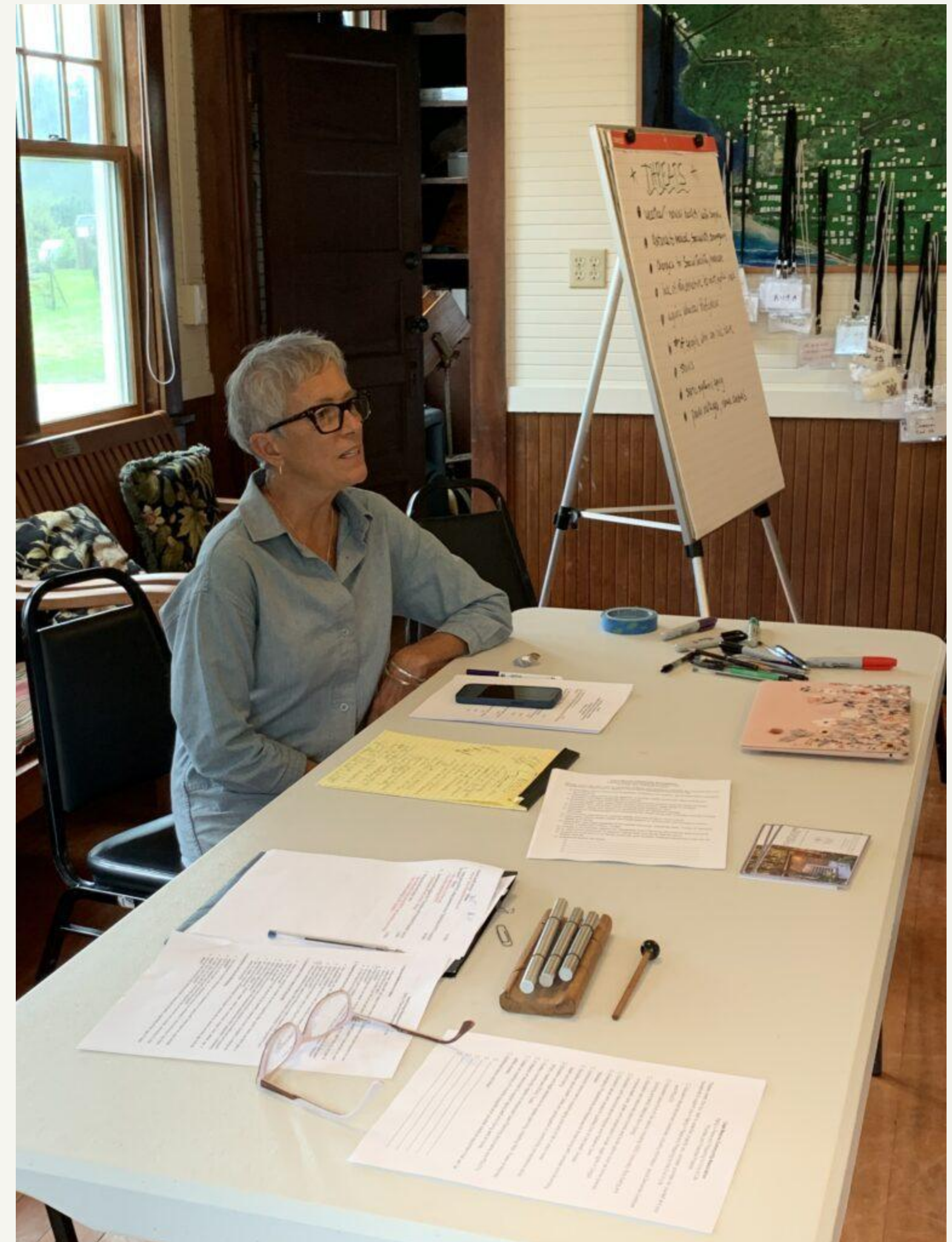


# Started with an Assessment

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- ❑ October 26, 2024 introduction to community facilitated by Margo Lalach
  - ❑ Described End of Life Collective
  - ❑ SWOT analysis
  - ❑ Small group discussions
  - ❑ Survey to identify areas of interest for Planning Team

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# Activities – Educational Presentations

**Educational presentations** (videotaped with \$600 grant and widely distributed)

- ❑ January 5: Estate planning
- ❑ February 8: Hospice, palliative care, patient advocacy, death doulas, slow medicine
- ❑ March 1: Advanced directives, dementia directives, POLSTs<sup>23</sup>, end of life options (Voluntary Stop Eating and Drinking), Medical Aid in Dying
- ❑ April 5: Burial options, funerals, celebrations, and legacy options





# Researched Local Resources

- ❑ Accessibility assessment
- ❑ Researched local resources
  - ❑ Tillamook Wellness
  - ❑ Adventist
  - ❑ Oregon DHS Senior and Disabilities Services
  - ❑ Tillamook Senior Center
  - ❑ Life flight
  - ❑ In home care options
  - ❑ Cemeteries
- ❑ Identified how to borrow durable equipment

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# Next Steps

- ❑ **Debrief Community in June**
  - ❑ Learnings and actions as a result of the educational series?
  - ❑ Resource research reports
  - ❑ Next steps
- ❑ **Community Reads: Finish Strong by Barbara Coombs Lee**
- ❑ **Patient Advocacy Training to Build Community Capacity**
  - ❑ Role of patient advocate and establishing boundaries
  - ❑ Techniques for advocating
  - ❑ Role playing and videos as evidence of intent
- ❑ **Community walks and dances**
- ❑ **Research possibility of a Cape Meares green burial cemetery**
- ❑ **Meet with Volunteer Firefighters**

# Still on the Table!

- ❑ Emotional components of aging, behavioral and brain health, loneliness and isolation
- ❑ Technology and AI
- ❑ Alzheimer's and dementia
- ❑ When you can't age in place: choosing an alternative
- ❑ Getting the most from Medicare

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- ❑ Conversations with family about aging in place and end of life planning
- ❑ Fall prevention and preparing home for aging
- ❑ Emergency preparedness for elderly in community
- ❑ Dancing with Aging with Grace
- ❑ Explore establishing a CM green cemetery



# NORTH COAST EOL COLLECTIVE

About Services Events Resources Fees Contact

## LIBRARY

Books | Podcasts | Research | Music

*This is not an exhaustive list of resources but are commonly referenced by the death care community*

## BOOKS

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GRUEF-BEREAVEMENT

# RESOURCES

- EOL Considerations
- Palliative and Hospice Care
- Community Resources
- Legacy
- Grief, Bereavement, Trauma
- Pediatric
- Population Specific
- Advanced Care Planning
- Funerals and Burials
- Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD)
- Innovation and Research
- Legal
- Caregiving
- Digital Legacy
- Community Based

# Reflections

“At first, I was horrified at attending a death cafe meeting ( likely a common occurrence?) but I’ve come to appreciate your compassion, encouragement, love, and grace handling this otherwise taboo topic. It’s vital on our paths of life. Many thanks for your kind words of support and much love” Death Cafe Participant

“I am so truly inspired by what you and your partners have created. I had quite a few new clients in your area in the last month....I really think that is due to all of your amazing work.” EOLCOR Volunteer Coordinator

“I have enjoyed seeing some of the work and outreach your group has been providing for the community over the last couple of months. Your group is an incredible resource for planning and navigating the dying and grief journey.”

Director, OHSU Body Donation Program

“What an amazing collection of resources! Thank you so much.” Client Consultation

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“I'm so very happy to have met you and learn about the exciting, vital work you are doing!” Resident, EOL Author

Please assist my sibling and me on their path of her last months..... stage IV cancer diagnosis was....they hoped for five years and chemotherapy treatment has been suspended by mutual agreement with their Oncologist.” Client Consultation

“It was such a joy to speak with both of you today, thank you so much. The timing on this is perfect for me and I can sense the amazing potential in what you all are offering.” Client Consultation

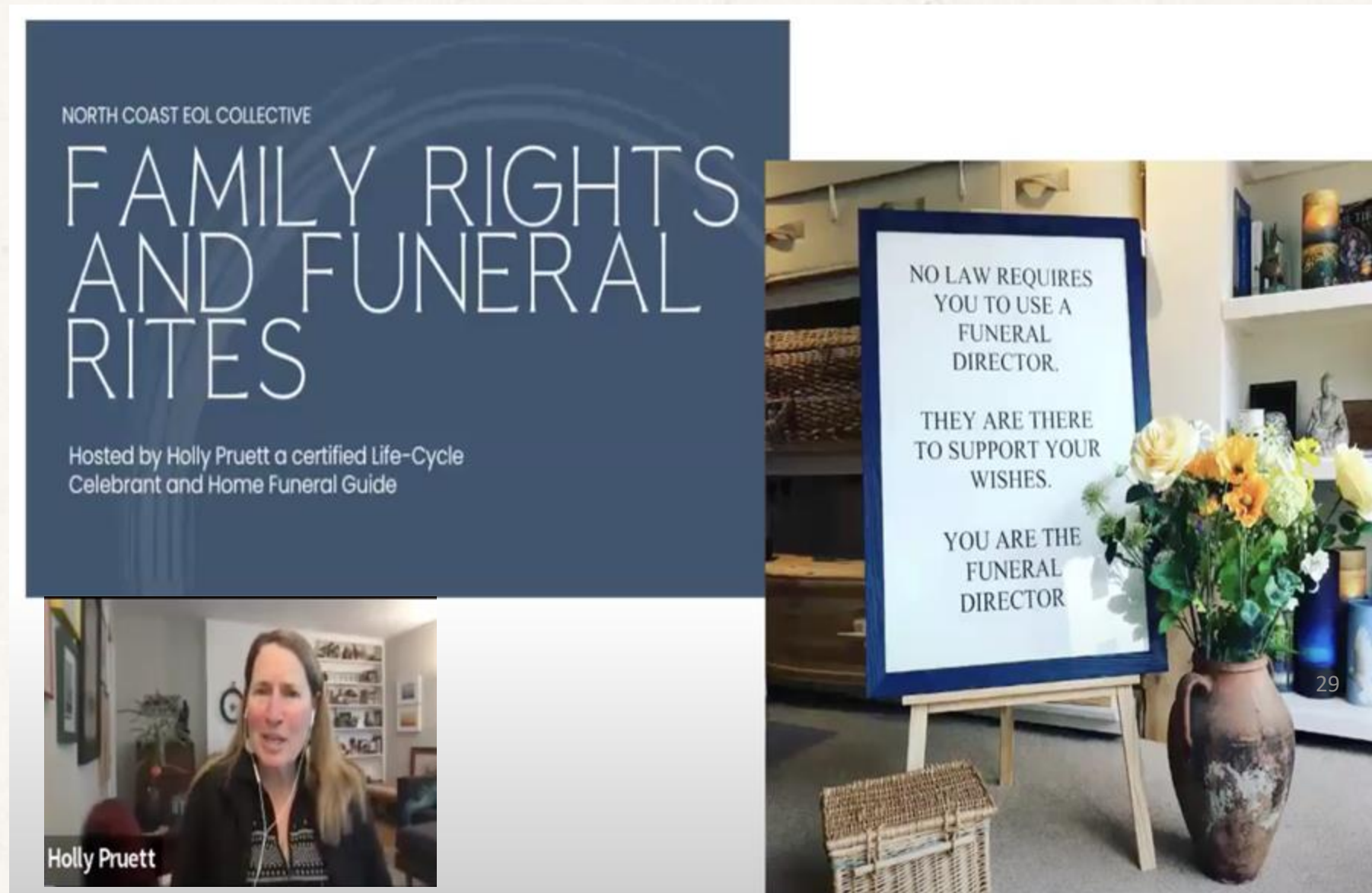
" Incredible! It is an immensely generous gift that was given today. I cannot be more thankful. Already working on my personal financial



# LIVING WELL

“We know conversations, connection, and learning about death and dying can improve the quality of one’s life and create a sense of community around a profound experience we all share.”

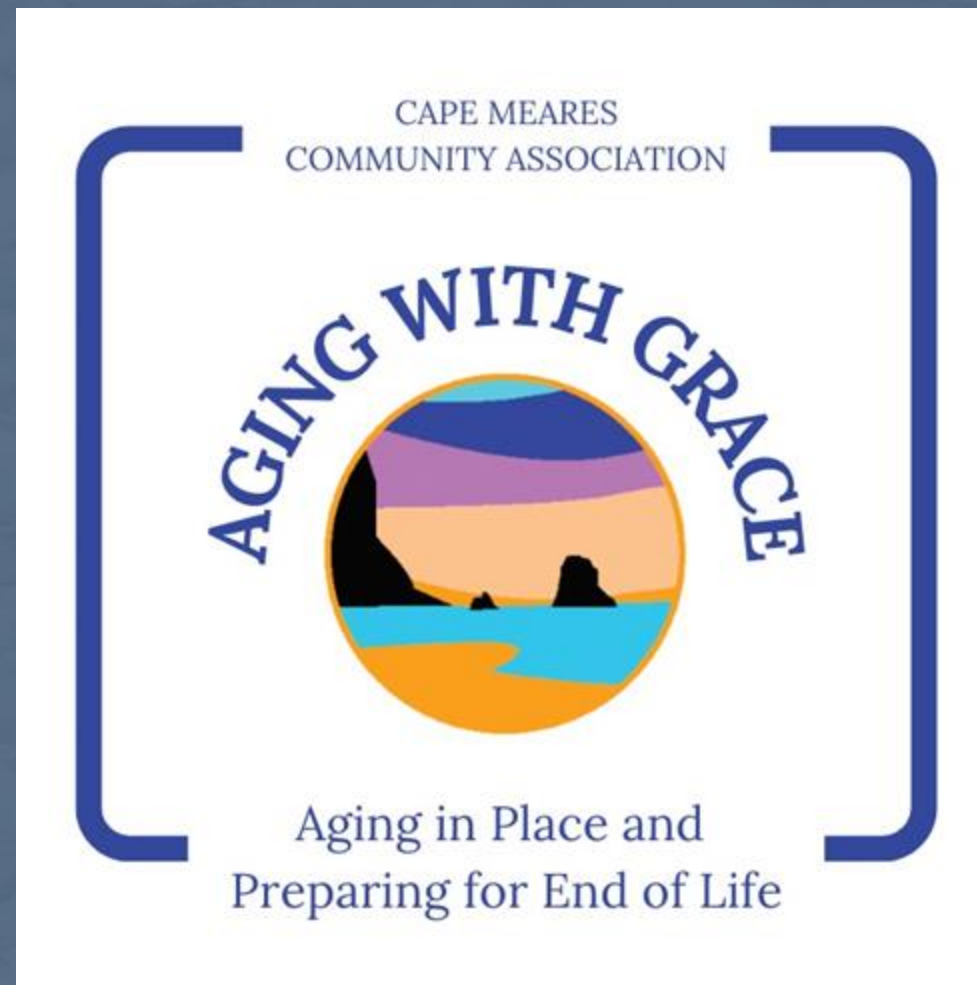
# ENDING WELL



*Family Rights and Funeral Rites*

with Holly Pruett

*“A just society ensures not only the right to live well—but  
to die well, with dignity and support.”*



**THANK YOU!**





# Thank you to the 2025 Forum partners!

Forum on Rural  
Population Health

